

3.8 Domestic Support

The need for domestic support is a time bomb. At first it seems irrelevant, a throwback to more primitive times. But for many couples, the need explodes after a few years of marriage, surprising both spouses.

Domestic support involves the creation of a peaceful and well-managed home environment. It includes cooking meals, washing dishes, washing and ironing clothes, house cleaning and child care. If you have the need for domestic support, when your spouse does some of these things, you feel very fulfilled, and when it is not done you feel very annoyed.

In earlier generations, it was assumed that all husbands had this need and all wives would naturally meet it. Times have changed, and needs have changed along with them. Now, many of the men I counsel would rather have their wives meet their needs for affection or conversation, needs which have traditionally been more characteristic of women. And many women, especially career women, gain a great deal of pleasure having their husbands create a peaceful and well-managed home environment for them. But on average, men still express this need more often than women.

Marriage usually begins with a willingness of both spouses to share domestic responsibilities. Newlyweds commonly wash dishes together, make the bed together, and divide many household tasks. The groom welcomes the help he gets from his wife, helping him do what he's been doing alone as a bachelor. At this point in marriage, neither of them would identify domestic support as an important emotional need. But the time bomb is ticking.

When does the need for domestic support explode? When the children arrive! Children create huge needs -- both a greater need for income and greater domestic responsibilities. The previous division of labor is now obsolete. Both spouses must take on new responsibilities -- and which ones will they take?

At this point in your marriage, especially if you do not have children, you may find no need for domestic support at all. But if you find yourself very appreciative of your spouse's cooking, cleaning, washing and childcare, and are very frustrated when they are not forthcoming, make sure that domestic support is on your list of important emotional needs.